

Foreword



National
Oceanic and
Atmospheric
Administration



U.S.
DEPARTMENT
OF
COMMERCE

NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Cooperative Research Partners Program

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service), Northeast Cooperative Research Partners Program (NCRPP) was initiated in 1999. The goals of this program are to enhance the data upon which fishery management decisions are made as well as to improve communication and collaboration among commercial fishery participants, scientists and fishery managers. NOAA Fisheries Service works in close collaboration with the New England Fishery Management Council's Research Steering Committee to set research priorities to meet management information needs.

Fishery management is, by nature, a multiple year endeavor which requires a time series of fishery dependent and independent information. Additionally, there are needs for immediate short-term biological, oceanographic, social, economic and habitat information to help resolve fishery management issues. Thus, the program established two avenues to pursue cooperative research through longer and short-term projects. First, short-term research projects are funded annually through competitive contracts. Second, three longer-term collaborative research projects were developed. These projects include: 1) a pilot study fleet (fishery dependent data); 2) a pilot industry based survey (fishery independent data); and 3) groundfish tagging (stock structure, movements and mixing, and biological data).

First, a number of short-term research projects have been developed to work primarily on commercial fishing gear modifications, improve selectivity of catch on directed species, reduce bycatch, and study habitat reactions to mobile and fixed fishing gear.

Second, two cooperative research fleets have been established to collect detailed fishery dependent and independent information from commercial fishing vessels. The original concept, developed by the Canadians, referred to these as "sentinel fleets". In the New England groundfish setting it is more appropriate to consider two industry research fleets. A pilot industry-based survey fleet (fishery independent) and a pilot commercial study fleet (fishery dependent) have been developed.

Additionally, extensive tagging programs are being conducted on a number of groundfish species to collect information on migrations and movements of fish, identify localized or subregional stocks, and collect biological and demographic information on these species.

For further information on the Cooperative Research Partners Programs please contact:

National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service)
Northeast Cooperative Research Partners Program

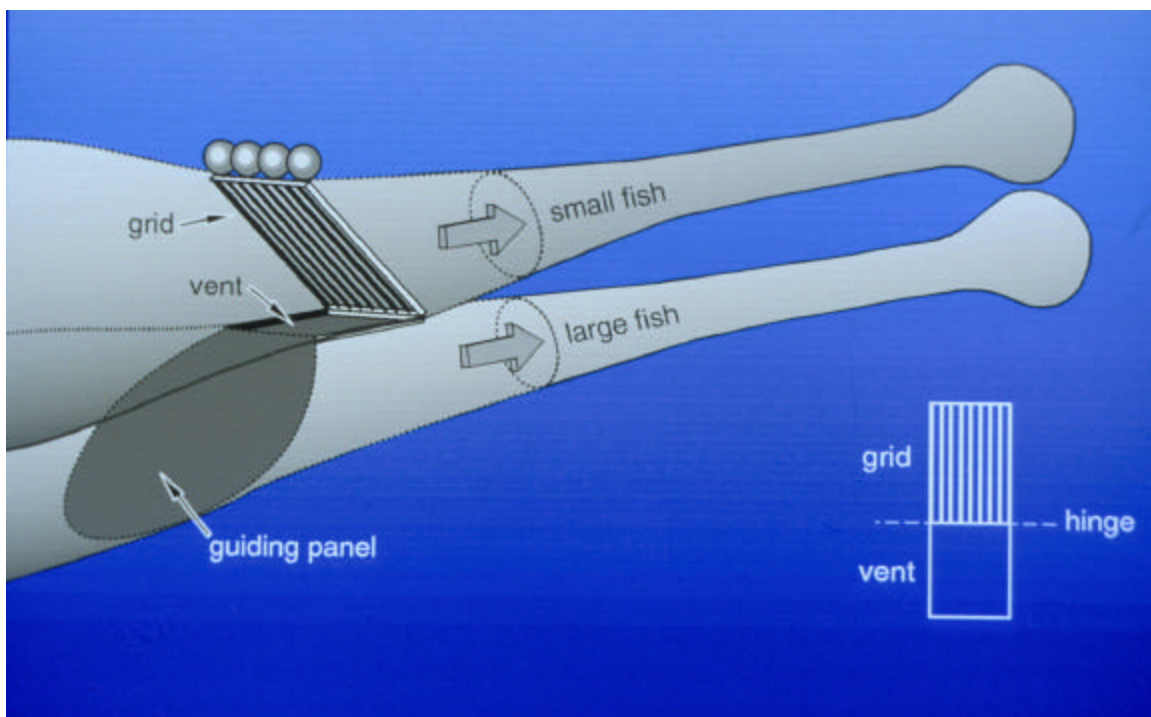
(978) 281-9276 – Northeast Regional Office of Cooperative Research
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www.nero.noaa.gov/StateFedOff/coopresearch/

Final Report

Proceedings of a series of port meetings with the
fishing industry (New England 2001)

Bycatch, Discard & Conservation Engineering Issues



Submitted February 26, 2002



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To

NOAA/NMFS Cooperative Research Partners Program
Northeast Region
&
New England Fisheries Management Council, Research Steering Committee

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Executive Summary

Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences (MCCS) was commissioned by the National Marine Fisheries Service, N.E. Region's Cooperative Research Partners Program to conduct a series of day-long workshops with the fishing industry in early 2001 to discuss issues relating to bycatch, discard and conservation engineering strategies.

The specific aims of this series of meetings were; to discuss and document issues of concern to fishermen of the New England Region with respect to bycatch, discard and conservation engineering technologies; to bring fishermen's unique experience and expertise more directly into the science and management framework; to help develop partnerships between fishermen, scientists and managers; to encourage commercial fishermen/vessels to participate in cooperative research and development of selective gear technologies; and perhaps most importantly, to help set local and regional research priorities aimed at mitigating bycatch and discard and improving selectivity of fishing gears.

A total of 10 meetings were held in Ellsworth ME, Rockland ME, Portland ME, Portsmouth NH, Gloucester MA, Plymouth MA, New Bedford MA, Hyannis MA, Point Judith, RI and Montauk NY. A meeting scheduled for Connecticut was held concurrently with the meeting in Rhode Island.

Despite extension and widespread advertising, meetings were in general poorly attended. This may have been due to the large number of meetings that were scheduled for late 2000 – early 2001 but may also reflect the fact that many in the industry feel a sense of disillusionment with current management practices and institutions. However, despite the low attendance, meetings were highly productive. It is unlikely that any additional issues would have been identified with higher attendance by fishermen.

Although each port identified problems or concerns specific to that area, there was a remarkable consistency across all ports in the issues and concerns expressed.

In general there was a great deal of frustration with fisheries management both at the Council level and with NMFS. This general disillusionment had a tendency to be expressed at every stage of meetings and had the effect of deflecting energy and attention from the main agenda items. However, it seems there was a clear need for these views to be expressed and documented.

Some participants explored creative approaches to specific issues but in general there was a surprising lack of futuristic thinking. One of the major aims of this series of scoping meetings was to encourage commercial fishermen/vessels to identify particular issues and concerns and to use the forum as a platform to develop ideas and explore potential solutions. The final step was to seek scientists and/or Institutions to partner with. However, a common and disappointing theme was the suggestion that what the industry needed was for the scientific community to identify a problem and to approach the fishing industry to get the projects carried out. This seems to be at odds with the rationale and intent of the whole process of collaborative research. Perhaps once successful research projects that truly involve fishermen as equal partners are demonstrated widely this attitude will change but at the present time this prevalent attitude could be a major hurdle to effective use of appropriated funds. However,

fishermen by nature are uniquely creative and innovative. Lack of discussion on innovative bycatch reduction techniques may simply be a reflection of unwillingness to make a good idea common knowledge in advance of a competitive proposal process. The same could be said of the scientific community.

Stewardship and changing practices was another hot issue. Industry and fishermen at each meeting were very firmly of the opinion that fishermen should be acknowledged for all the efforts that they make on a daily basis. Fishermen do not want to discard fish so they move to a different area, or modify their gear, or don't fish at all. They also wanted to put on record that attitudes have changed and that there is a greater sense of stewardship now than ever before. Fishermen feel they actively protect the fish for the future and the days of just catching everything (if they ever existed) are long since gone.

A wide range of topics was discussed during the meetings. Each issue raised was considered sufficiently important to be raised in the first place. We have therefore avoided condensing issues or assessing priorities. We draw attention to the information in Tables 1 through 7 and the flipchart summary, as the true substance of this series of meetings. However, we have attempted to generate broad category recommendations that may be of use in setting research priorities. We believe the recommendations are supported by the general discussions.

The recommendations include;

- Improve monitoring of bycatch/discard levels
- Implement **coordinated** programs to address bycatch/discard in key fisheries
- Document reaction behavior of key species
- Address gear selectivity issues
- Implement studies to understand mortality of discards
- Develop outreach and education programs coordinated with bycatch reduction research programs

We further recommend that the lists of species and issues of concern outlined in the body of this report be addressed in a systematic manner.

Overall meetings were extremely productive. We hope this document will provide background material and tools for all those interested in making collaborative research a success. Furthermore it is our perception that the process has helped build bridges between some scientists, fishermen and managers and will undoubtedly help future research programs be more effective. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, we believe the transcripts and audio recordings provide a remarkable snapshot of the thoughts, concerns, ideas, enthusiasm and philosophy of the fishing industry in the New England region. In time the transcripts may become a valuable document relating to the state the fishing industry in New England 2001.

NMFS and the NEFMC research steering committee deserve great credit for supporting and financing this program.